1 APRIL
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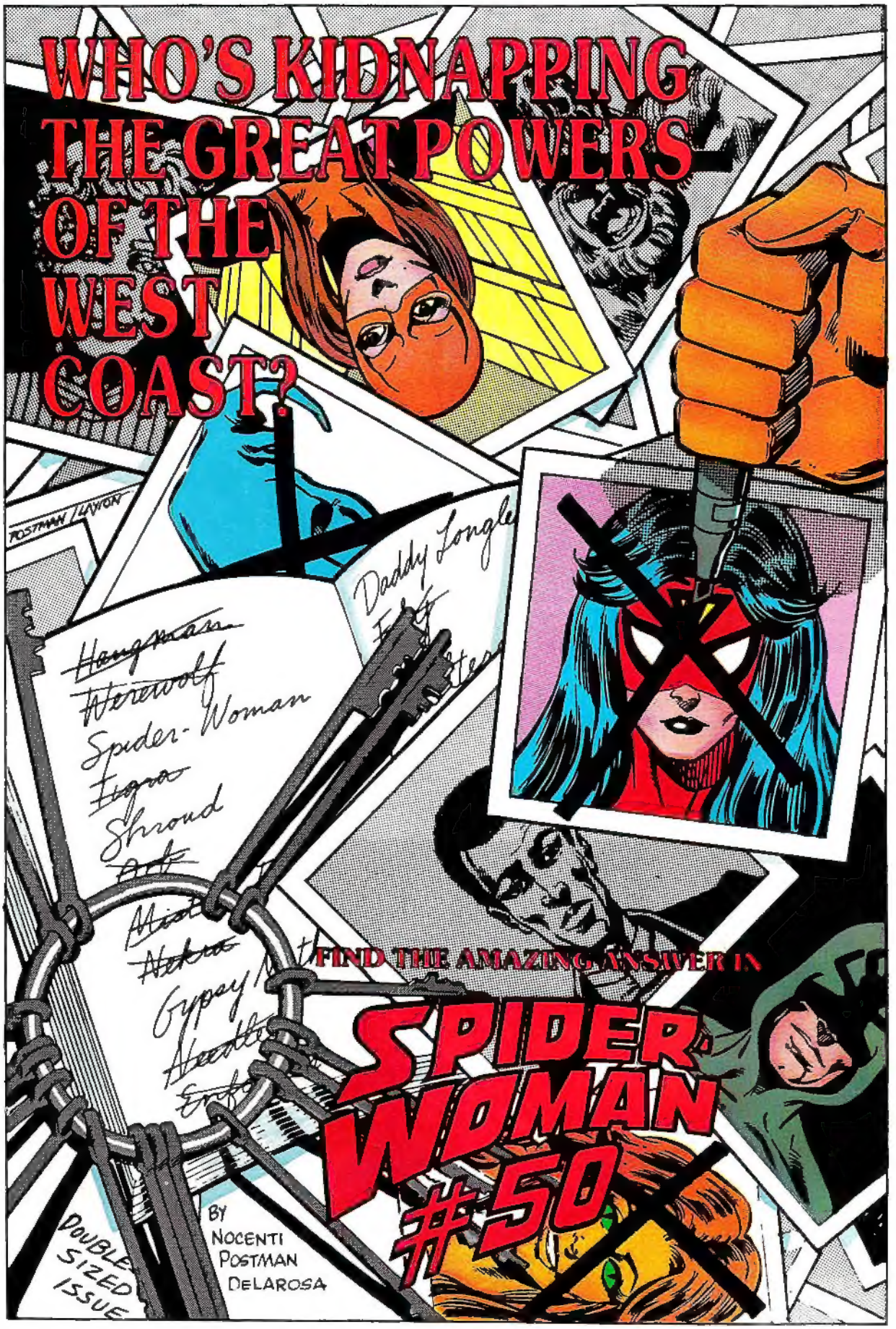
ONLY 25¢
THE STORY BEHIND CRYSTAR ★ THE MAKING OF THE MARVEL HANDBOOK ★ ORIGINAL ART ★ PHOTOS ★ AND MUCH MORE!


WHO'S KIDNAPPING THE GREAT POWERS OF THE WEST COAST?
POSTMAN / LAWON
Daddy Longle
Hangman
Werewolf
Spider-Woman
Iron
Shroud
Gypsy
FIND THE AMAZING ANSWER IN
SPIDER WOMAN #50
BY NOCENTI POSTMAN DELAROSA
DOUBLE SIZED ISSUE

MARVEL AGE

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ON THE COVER: Walt Simonson's original conception of the cover for CRYSTAR #1. The final cover was done by Bob Larkin.

What is Marvel Age?

There are two ways of answering that question. The Marvel Age of Comics began way back in the 1960s when Stan Lee and Jack Kirby gave us the first heroes with problems—the Fantastic Four. The only problems the FF did not have were sales related as they took off, bringing in a whole new era of comics, setting styles and trends that would eventually be copied by other companies but would always have had their roots in the Marvel mythos.

Indeed, the Marvel Age ushered in a whole universe of characters and concepts so vast that we are finally publishing a bible to the whole furshlugginer thing, the Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe. But more on that later.

Could this be Carol Kalish, Mistress of Propaganda?

There have always been comic fanzines (even before the Marvel Age began). Fanzines to let you know what's happening, where it's happening, when, who's doing it, how people feel about it, and so on. Marvel itself has even had a couple, but Marvel Age is the first Marvel-Produced fanzine available to all and sundry, at the inflation-fighting cost of .25¢, that will tell you everything you want to know about what's going on in the hallowed halls of Marvel.

Will there be hype? Sure there will. When we have projects coming out that we get excited about, we want you to know. We want to try and transmit some of the enthusiasm that seizes us when exciting projects come along, or when one of our current titles takes an unexpected twist, gets a hot new artist, or undergoes astounding changes.

One such new project winging your way is CRYSTAR, the other-worldly tale of two brothers vying for the rule of their home. Written by Mary Jo Duffy, with art by Bret Blevins and Vince Colletta (and if you've seen their wonderous work on our Dark Crystal adaptation, no more need be said), CRYSTAR is the first of the new projects that Marvel will be sending your way in 1983. The first true fantasy that Marvel has done in quite some time, CRYSTAR proves that we are constantly expanding, experimenting and seeking different directions in which to grow. Mary Jo Duffy and Bret Blevins speak at length about the work that has gone into the new series, and we know that after perusing our coverage of it, you'll be looking forward to it as enthusiastically as we.

Further in we have an in-depth article on what really went into the creation of our smash, THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE. One need only page through any issue of the Handbook to be struck with the realization that an incredible amount of work has gone into this project, and in Marvel Age we give you the in-depth look at the research and energy that Mark Gruenwald and his intrepid team have gone to to produce probably the most asked for project ever produced by Marvel. Learn how we decided which characters to include, to exclude, how the artists were selected, info gathered, and who actually wrote the darned thing. It's even explained why Devil Dinosaur isn't included (although not to *my* satisfaction).

Peruse our news column to learn what's coming up—we include a complete list of upcoming projects for Marvel and the inside story of the great Spidey mirror hoax. Our Coming Attractions will give you insight into what's going to be happening down the road in our regular series, as well as when new ones will be making their debuts. And be sure to read Editorial Notes, as each of our editors gets their own space to sound off about what's happening in their books, what's on their minds, and even (for you budding artists/and/or writers) what they're looking for when it comes to seeking out new talent.

In future issues we intend to give you a preview of John Byrne's ALPHA FLIGHT, some insight into the making of Epic Comics, including the next title in that line, COYOTE, and much more. As to additional columns, articles, interviews and so forth, let us know what you'll be wanting to see. What questions do you want answered? What people do you want to know about? Our address is down at the bottom of this page, and we look forward to hearing from you.

What is Marvel Age, then? It's Marvel's direct line to the fans. You let us know what you want, and we'll do the best we can to give it to you.

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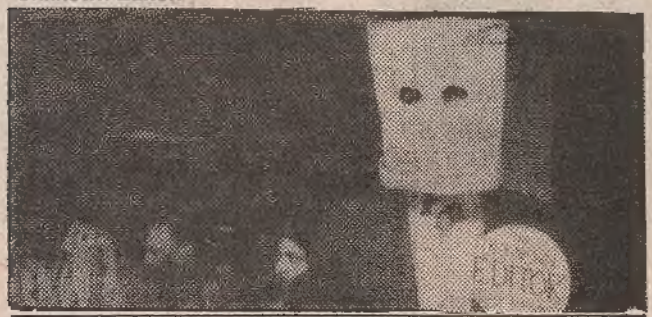
NEWSWATCH NEWSWATCH NEWSWATCH

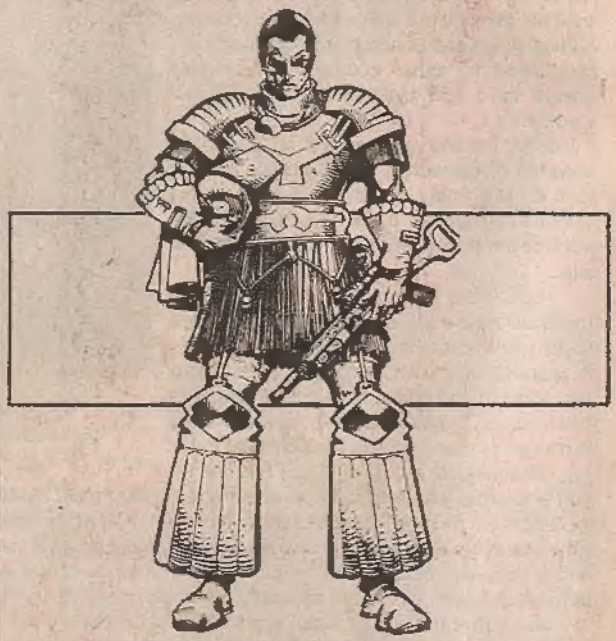
It has recently been announced that Editor-in-Chief **Jim Shooter** has been made an honest-to-gosh Vice President (and here we always thought he was speaker of the house). What does this actually mean? Will he have to move his office up to the executive 11th floor? Will he start calling the fan press "Nattering Nabobs of negativism?" Will he be a heartbeat away from the presidency? Hell no! It means that we have yet another excuse for a Mighty Marvel *Pizza Party*.

Speaking of parties, although this is being read at Christmas time, we're still cleaning up from our Halloween Party. In attendance were **Indiana Jones**, **Dorothy** and her pet slug **Toto**, **Pizza Face**, **Mick Belker**, a bearded **Thor** fan, a six-eyed **Mark Gruenwald**, his assistant **Mike "*Flasher*" Carlin**, and that paper-bagged pundit, the **Unknown Editor**.



In case you're wondering why we're about to have **KULL THE CONQUEROR #1** winging your way in late January, considering that KTC #1 just came out last September, don't just assume that you're seeing old copies of last year's book. This four-issue miniseries has a new format—48 pages but at $1.25. This will be Marvel's first experimentation with Mando paper, a paper stock not quite as heavy as Baxter, but with a whiter sheen to it that will more than do justice to **John Buscema's** full pencils o this book. We look forward to your reactions. The script is by **Bruce Jones**, and no, despite what you may think after reading recent issues of **Ka-Zar**, **Kull** does *not* spend most of the issue wandering through the **City of Wonders** with a spear through his head . . .

Walt (X-Men/Titans) **Simonson** has completed the pencilling, inking and scripting of his greatly anticipated graphic novel THE STAR SLAMMERS, so that epic will now be in stores in mid-February. For continuity buffs, STAR SLAMMERS will be Graphic Novel #6, with Chris Claremont and Brent Anderson's X-MEN now becoming #5. Below—a character portrait of one of **Walt's** Slammers.



Marvel will be publishing a new title, THE MYSTERIONS, the first issue of which is scheduled to appear in late February. It's the story of three robot visitors to earth, and should not be confused with Dave Cockrum's graphic novel, THE MYSTERIONS, which has been retitled THE FUTURIANS. Got all that?

Tom DeFalco shown here keeping a straight face as he announces the Spider-Man Mirror Book at a fan press conference. See opposite page for details.

A format change for **RED SONJA** will also result in the She-devil's four-issue miniseries beginning its bi-monthly schedule in March with a #1. It will be 48 pages, $1.

To set the record straight once and for all, **Red Sonja's** new costume was designed by **Dave Simons**, with *minor* revisions by **Larry Hama**. The request for the change came from Conan Properties (resulting in the initial delay in the series) because there are options afoot for a **Red Sonja** motion picture, and they wanted **Sonja** to sport a costume that an actress could wear convincingly. I don't know—back in the days of the **Sonja** costume competitions, *I* always thought **Wendy Pini** was *very* convincing. It's a shame Wendy's dropped out of sight since then . . .

THOR fans take note—Beginning in the middle of 1983, Walt Simonson will be taking over the writing and pencilling on the Thunder God's title. If you're an admirer of Walt's work (and who isn't) you know how good it'll be.

Marvel Comics will not be doing an adaptation of **REVENGE OF THE JEDI!** Why? Because Lucasfilms has changed the name of the film to **RETURN OF THE JEDI.** (Somewhat ironic since "The Wrath of Khan" had to be changed from "The Vengeance of Khan" to avoid confusion with **"Revenge of the Jedi."**) When Marvel's version does appear in late May, in its .60¢ form, it will be a four-part miniseries separate from the regular STAR WARS book, instead of being shoe-horned into that title's continuity.

Just to make it easier for you readers to keep track of who is editing what, below is a list of the titles and current editorial assignments. Careful study will actually reveal patterns to some of the assignments, for those of you who think lots are drawn or some similar random procedure is followed:

DeFalco

Spider-Man
Peter Parker
Team Up
Marvel Tales
Cloak & Dagger
Sub-Mariner
Spider-Man Novel (Layton)
Hercules

Macchio

What If
ROM
Dazzler
US 1
Micronauts
Wonder Man
Crystar
Avengers Novel
Black Dragon Novel
Super Fighters Novel
Kull

Gruenwald

Avengers
Iron Man
Thor
Captain America
Marvel Universe
Super-Villain TU

Hama

Savage Sword
Conan
King Conan
Sonja
Machine Man
Star Trek III
Obnoxio vs X-Men
Funny Animals
Crazy
Fire & Ice
Mantis

Jones

Ka-Zar
X-Men
New Mutants
Star Wars
Indiana Jones
Fumetti
Nightcrawler
Illyana and Storm

O'Neil

Daredevil
Power/Fist
Bizarre Adventures
Moon Knight
Krull
Hawkeye
G.I. JOE
Alpha Flight

Milgrom

Defenders
Fanfare
Hulk
FF
2in1 (Thing)
Dr. Strange
Warlock
Spider-Man Novel (Golden)
Dr. Strange Novel
Mysterions Novel
Wonderwar Novel
Scuff Novel

If there are any titles that appear that you don't recognize, have no fear! In months to come we will reveal the details on all the projects you see listed, plus a couple that you don't!

AT LAST IT CAN BE TOLD DEPT.

REFLECTIONS IN A SPIDER'S EYE

At the monthly fan press conference last September, it was announced that **FANTASTIC FOUR #252**, the first in a four-part Negative Zone adventure, would be the first sideways comic ever produced. The art, the cover, everything would be sideways. And right after this was announced, **Lance Tooks**, the assistant to the FF's editor, **Tom DeFalco**, repeated a wisecrack that **Tom** had made earlier: "And if you think that's something, wait until you see the backwards issue of Spider-Man." Supposedly, according to **Tom**'s warped scenario, an issue of **Spider-Man** would be printed backwards to tie in with the release of a **Spidey** hand mirror, which would be used to read the furshlugginer thing. A *joke* right?

Two weeks later a fan correspondent straight-facedly reported the S-M mirror as an *actual* project, attributing the book's announcement to **Jim Shooter**, particularly amusing since **Shooter** was astonished to see the announcement he had supposedly made in print and cornered **DeFalco**, who said, "It was just a joke, Jim." Morosely, **Shooter** said, in his best Eeyore mood, "You know what'll happen—we'll announce we're not doing this, and everybody's going to think Marvel caved in to pressure."

It was subsequently reasoned that, if this will be the belief, let's do it up right.

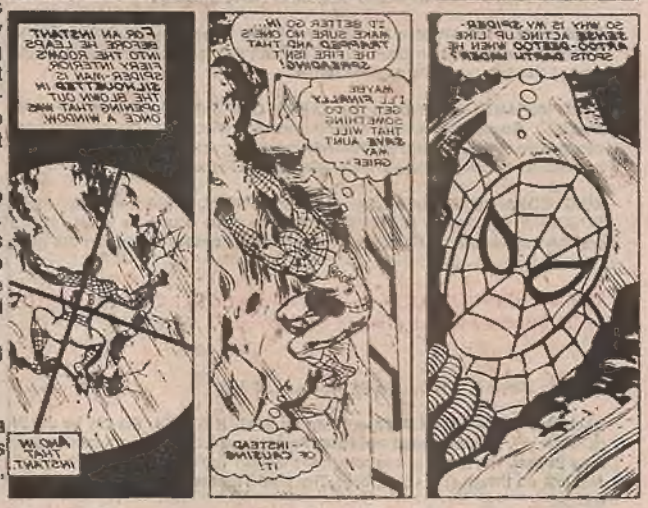
At the next fan press conference, **DeFalco** and his co-conspirators came armed with two pages of a **Spider-Man** inventory story printed backwards (courtesy of some quick negative flip-flopping from the Marvel stat room) and a white hand mirror, purchased at Woolworths, with a sticker of **Spidey** on the back. With this paraphanalia in hand, it was announced that the April cover-dated issue of Spider-Man would be printed backwards—not just printed, but actually drawn and lettered backwards.

Pens scribbled and tape recorders whirred as **Tom DeFalco** dropped clue after clue as to the bogus aspects of the whole affair. Acting the outraged editor, **Tom** stated, "This whole thing was thought up by some joker on the tenth floor," referring of course to himself. Thinking that **Tom** meant it was an executive decision, he was asked, "Don't you mean the eleventh floor?" **Tom** shrugged and said, "Whatever."

At one point he said "A sick, perverted mind thought this up," and then later said, "As you know, I have a sick, perverted mind."

Finally he said, "We're hoping that maybe we can make this a special issue, outside of the normal continuity. In that event, this issue would be Number One, April," a blatant allusion to April 1st, April Fool's Day. No one picked up on it.

Below: Artwork from the bogus Spider-Man reverse story. The fan press was told that issue was pencilled by John Romita, Jr., yet this page is from a Don Perlin art job. No one noticed or commented.



MARVEL® COMICS COMING ATTRACTIONS

The following comics have a July cover date:
Shipping March 1, 1983; on sale March 22, 1983:

THE THING #1—Written by JOHN BYRNE. Pencils by RON WILSON. The first issue of the **FF** powerhouse's adventures gets off to an explosive start as **Ben Grimm** is forced to confront his own troubled, never-before-revealed past as he faces a youth gang.

DAZZLER #27—Written and pencilled by FRANK SPRINGER. Inks by VINCE COLLETTA. **Alison Blaire** and her sister are on the run across country, fleeing from a murder her sister believes she has committed as a result of her bizarre mutant power. No wonder this one's called "Fugitive."

KA-ZAR #27—Written by BRUCE JONES. Pencils and inks by ARMANDO GIL. Back in the Savage Land, **Ka-Zar** and **Shanna's** only hope of survival lays in the hands of **Bath** and the advanced science of **Aerie-Shalehn.**

DAREDEVIL #189—Written by DENNY O'NEIL. Pencils by KLAUS JANSON. **Bullseye** is a hopeless cripple. . . isn't he? But that may not continue to be the case in this tale guest-starring **Wolverine!**

NEW MUTANTS #5—Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT. Pencils by BOB McLEOD. **Sunspot's** mother, a world famous archeologist, disappears in the headwaters of the Amazon, and **Roberto** insists that the **New Mutants** search for her, only to discover—the grandeur that was. . . Rome!

KING CONAN #17—Written by ALAN ZELENETZ. Breakdowns by JOHN BUSCEMA. Finishes by RUDY NEBRES. With grave doubts as to his father's capability of leadership, **Conn** goes on a personal odyssey to discover the value of kings.

THE MYSTERIONS #2 – A trio of otherworldly robots stranded on earth. Will they save the world, or destroy it?

Shipping March 8, 1983; on sale March 29, 1983:

AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #242—Written by ROGER STERN. Pencils by JOHN ROMITA, JR. **Lance Bannon** and **Peter Parker** have a heated confrontation over **Amy Powell.** The return of a female from the past. The **Black Cat** in the hospital. And just so things stay interesting—**The Mad Thinker** and his super-powered android!

CAPTAIN AMERICA #283—J.D. DeMATTEIS (writer), MIKE ZECK (penciller) and JOHN BEATTY (inker) bring you the smashing conclusion to the **Viper/ Nomad** trilogy.

THOR #333—Written by ALAN ZELENETZ. Pencils by BOB HALL. The final showdown between the **God of Thunder** and the **Lord of Vampires** as **Thor** battles **Dracula** in a contest of weather-commanding ability and sheer power!

CRYSTAR #2—Written by MARY JO DUFFY. Pencils by BRET BLEVINS. Inks by VINCE COLLETTA. Introducing the newest member of the **Crystal** people—**Ika,** the daughter of the wizard **Ogeode.**

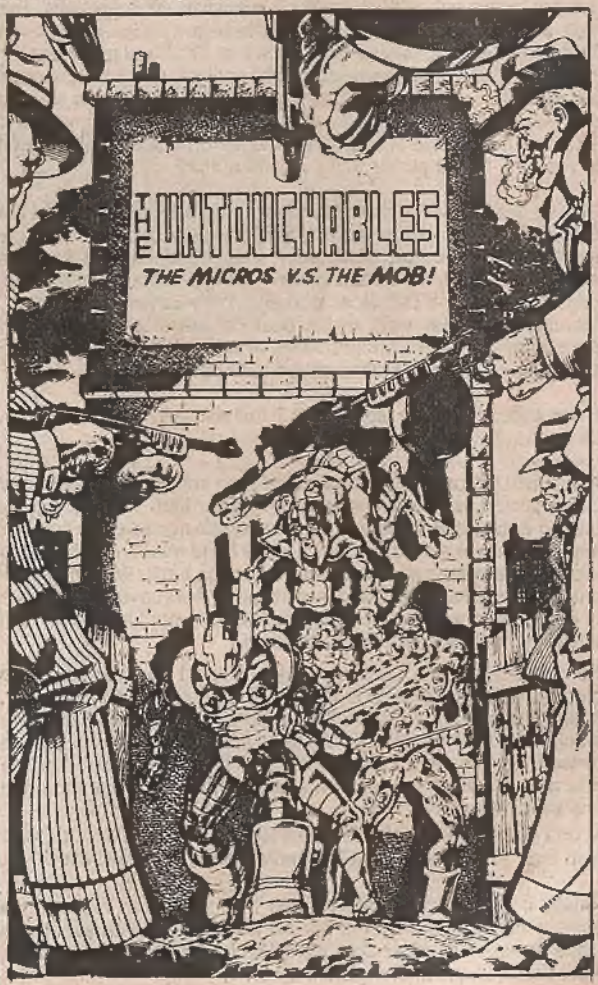
MOON KNIGHT #32—Written by DOUG MOENCH. Pencils by KEVIN NOWLAN. Reporter **Joy Mercado** hits the streets in "Shattered Myths," seeking the story behind two street legends—**Moon Knight,** and the mysterious **Druid Walsh.** What she discovers will shock her and you.

INDIANA JONES #7—Written by DAVID MICHELINIE. Pencils by RON FRENZ. Continuing the adventures of the intrepid archeologist in his search for the ruins of Atlantis.

KULL THE CONQUEROR #2—Written by ALAN ZELENETZ. Full pencils by JOHN BUSCEMA. Inks by DAN GREEN. **Kull** is forced to leave the City of Wonders when **Tu** is critically injured and **Kull** must seek out an herb that may be the dying man's last chance. But in doing so he encounters a race of bird people, led by a warrior who may be **Kull's** match.

U.S. 1 #3—Written by AL MILGROM. Pencils by HERB TRIMPE. **U.S.** and company face the tantalizing threat of the woman known as **Midnight.**

MICRONAUTS #53—Written by BILL MANTLO. Pencils and inks by BUTCH GUICE. **Commander Rann's** band face danger, gangland style, as they find themselves on a prison world planet resembling earth where the only form of law and order is "The Untouchables."



Shipping March 15, 1983; on sale April 5, 1983:

INCREDIBLE HULK #285—Written by BILL MANTLO. Pencils by SAL BUSCEMA. Inks by JOE SINNOTT. "Today is the First Day of the Rest of My Life," declares **Dr. Bruce Banner**, who designs and builds a research complex called **Northwind** in order to pursue his long sidetracked goal—being a scientist. But what happens when the equipment is finally hooked up, we can't reveal!

AVENGERS #233—Written by ROGER STERN. Pencils by AL MILGROM. In a crossover with **Fantastic Four #256**, the **Avengers** battle to save the world from the threat of **Annihilus.**

CONAN THE BARBARIAN #148—Written by BRUCE JONES. Pencils by JOHN BUSCEMA. Inks by ERNIE CHAN. A tribe fighting for survival in the wasteland; a forbidden fruit; a strange curse and a bizarre metamorphosis all add up to the "Plague of Forlek."

MARVEL TALES #153—Reprinting from **Spider-Man #15** the **web-slinger's first** encounter with **"Kraven the Hunter,"** as brought to you by STAN LEE and STEVE DITKO.

X-MEN #171—Written by CHRIS CLAREMONT. Pencils by PAUL SMITH. Inks by BOB WIACEK. The sparks fly when the mutant **Rogue** joins the **X-Men** and her most bitter foe, **Carol Danvers** (now the **Binary**) finds out about it.

POWER MAN/IRON FIST #95—Written by KURT BUSIEK. Pencils by DENYS COWAN. While on a much-needed vacation, **Danny** and **Luke** get involved with a house party being ripped off by criminals who are more than what they seem—they have a deeper, darker purpose that will affect the life of **Danny Rand.**

G.I. JOE #13—Written by LARRY HAMA. Pencils by MIKE VOSBURG. **Snake-Eyes** finds himself trapped in a bunker underneath a river in South America. And that's the good news! The bad news is that his bunker mates are **Quinn** the Eskimo and the evil **Dr. Venom.**

RED SONJA #1—Written by TOM DeFALCO. Pencils by DAVE SIMONS. Inks by NESTOR REDONDO. "While Lovers Embrace, Demons Feed." While trapped in the middle of a town's economic war with a wizard, **Sonja** comes upon an enchanted medallion that protects her from all harm. But the amulet demands a high price from those who use its powers. . .

Shipping March 22, 1983; on sale April 12, 1983:

ROM #44—Written by BILL MANTLO. Pencils by SAL BUSCEMA. Inks by IAN AKIN & BRIAN GARVEY. **Rom** and **Starshine** meet up with the **Gremlin,** who offers hope for the dying **Rom**-turned-human. But all is threatened by the arrival of the **Devastator** and the **Soviet Super Soldiers!**

FANTASTIC FOUR #256—A JOHN BYRNE production as the **FF** face their final battle with the lord of the **Negative Zone, Annihilus.**

MARVEL TEAM-UP #131—Written by J.M. DeMATTEIS. Pencils by KERRY GAMMILL. Inks by MIKE ESPOSITO. At last—the long awaited, much requested return of the **Leap Frog!**

IRON MAN #172—Written by DENNY O'NEIL. Pencils by LUKE McDONNELL. Inks by STEVE MITCHELL. The new **Iron Man** finally faces a true test of whether or not he can cut it as a substitute **Golden Avenger.**

PETER PARKER #80—Written by BILL MANTLO. Pencils by AL MILGROM. Inks by JIM MOONEY. Featuring the **Punisher, Boomerang,** and the return of **Cloak & Dagger.**

DEFENDERS #121—Written by J.M. DeMATTEIS. Pencils by DON PERLIN. The **Defenders** are put in a bizarre position in "Savior" as, on an Indonesian island, they fight to stop the all-powerful Miracle Man from . . . saving the world? Also: a major turning point in the lives of **Daimon Hellstrom** and **Patsy Walker.**

STAR WARS #73—Written by DAVID MICHELINIE. Pencils by BOB LAYTON. A flashback sequence involving an old friend of **Luke's** from the planet of Ice, **Hoth.**

THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE #7—Covering the M's from the **Mandarin** to **Mystique.** And don't miss the special map of Marvel's Manhattan that will give you the lowdown on exactly where in the Big Apple all the places you've read about are actually situated.

FROM THE EPIC LINE:

EPIC ILLUSTRATED #18 (Shipping 3/15, on sale 4/5, June cover date)—A cover by JIM STERANKO kicks off an issue featuring "Tail Gunner" by MARY JO DUFFY and KENT WILLIAMS, "Garbage Scow" by BOB HALL, and "The Demon" by Japanese animator GO NAGAI (of "Starvengers" fame).

DREADSTAR #4 (Shipping 3/22, on sale 4/12, May cover date)—A JIM STARLIN production as **Dedi** and **Skeevo** take center stage this time around to save the day.

MARVEL MAGAZINES:

FIRE AND ICE: MARVEL SUPER SPECIAL #25 (Shipping 3/15, on sale 4/5)—Written by DENNY O'NEIL. Art reproduced directly from the cels of this Ralph Bakshi Frank Frazetta animated film. A saga of sword and sorcery as the evil **King Nekron's** plot to cover the entire planet with ice is fought by one lone enclave of warmth—**Firekeep**—as **Firekeep's** ruler sends his greatest warriors, including the mysterious **Darkwolf** and **Princess Tigra,** to do battle.

BIZARRE ADVENTURES #35 (Shipping 3/15, on sale 4/5, May cover date)—Animal lovers take note as this first direct-only edition of **Bizarre Adventures** tells stories of **Strange Pets,** including a pet mountain and a strange pet kept by a group of suburban matrons for special occasions.

SAVAGE SWORD OF CONAN #89 (Shipping 3/8, on sale 3/29), June cover date)—Written by MICHAEL FLEISCHER. Pencils and inks by ALFREDO ALCALA. **Conan** becomes involved with two wealthy brothers, gamblers, who want him to rescue their sister from the "Slave Marts of Asgalum." But do the gamblers have a hidden motive? Bet on it.

SLIP #4 (Shipping 3/22, on sale 4/12, May cover date)—Tips on how to beat the home versions of Baseball games, and an interview with the President of Coleco.

MARVEL AGE #4 (Shipping 3/15, on sale upon arrival)—The editors speak. The artists write. ROGER STERN's most unwanted stories. All this and BOB LAYTON, too.

FANFARE #9 (Shipping 3/15, on sale 4/5, July cover date)—Written by J.M. DeMATTEIS. Pencils by J.J. BROZOWSKI. Inks by GREY MORROW. The **Man Thing** faces a bizarre deal which could restore his humanity but cost him his soul in "Rock and Soul."

While we never knowingly print inaccurate information in these pages, Marvel Comics reserves the right to make any changes which may become necessary. We're sorry for any inconvenience this may cause.

—The Bullpen.

REMINDER TO RETAIL STORE OWNERS:

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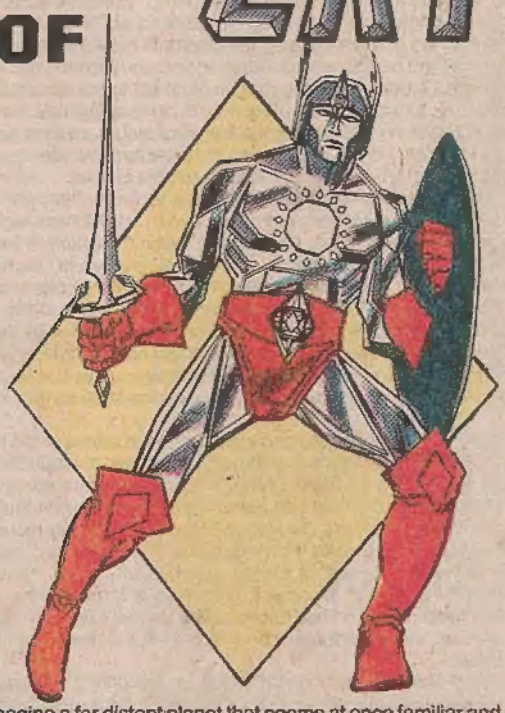
THE SAGA OF CRYSTAR

by Peter Sanderson



Imagine a far distant planet that seems at once familiar and unfamiliar. It is inhabited by human beings like yourselves, but none of the animals are like those of Earth, and morever, thanks to the planet's widespread volcanic activity, almost everywhere that one might expect to find wood, stone, or metal, one finds instead – crystal. Castles are made of glittering, multi-faceted crystal. Furniture is made of crystal. Certain articles of clothing are made of crystal. Furthermore, waging war upon this planet on behalf of magical forces are two powerful groups of rocklike humanoid warriors. One group is composed of men made of volcanic magma, while the other, serving the cause of Order, consists of people who are themselves made of crystal.

This is the world of Marvel's new fantasy series which takes its name from its principal hero, *Crystar*. The first issue is written by Mary Jo Duffy and pencilled by newcomer Bret Blevins, both of whom will remain as the regular team on the series, and is inked by Vince Colletta.

Mary Jo Duffy is familiar to Marvel readers as longtime writer of *Power Man and Iron Fist*, former editor of such series as *Doctor Strange* and *Rom*, and current associate editor of *Epic Illustrated* and the new Epic Comics line (which so far includes Jim Starlin's *Dreadstar* and the Steve Englehart-Steve Leialoha *Coyote*). She is also the editor of the forthcoming Marvel mini-series adaptation of the next *Star Wars* film, *Return of the Jedi*, by Archie Goodwin and Al Williamson.

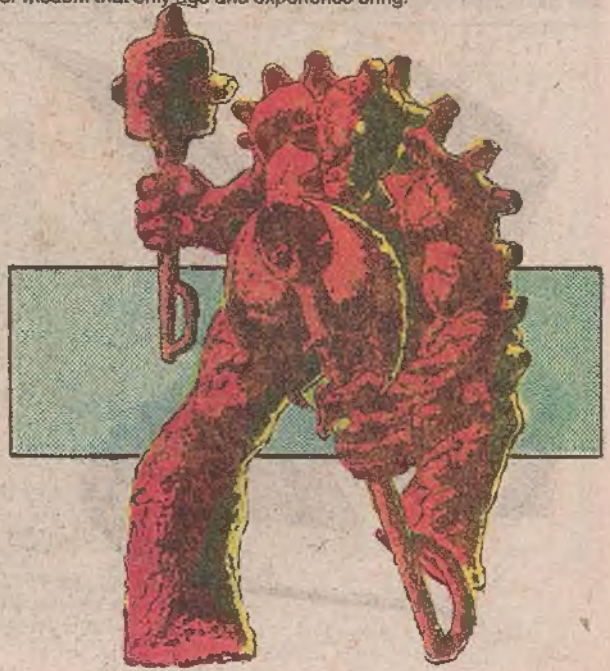
Bret Blevins' name is less familiar to Marvel readers, but he surely drew their attention with his remarkable work on Marvel's adaptation of the new Jim Henson fantasy film *The Dark Crystal*, now on sale. Blevins, who is from Nevada, and says he has been influenced by the comics work of Neal Adams and Berni Wrightson, among others, began making submissions to Marvel editor Al Milgrom back in 1978 when Milgrom was still working at DC. He and Milgrom continued to correspond, and finally Milgrom, who had by now joined Marvel, gave him his first assignment, a *Shanna the She-Devil* story. Taken with Brian Froud's designs for the *Dark Crystal* film, Blevins sent samples of *Dark Crystal* drawings to Marvel, and to his happy surprise was given the assignment to do the adaptation. Blevins' success in this project in part led to his being assigned to *Crystar*, and he is involved in other projects in various formats for Marvel which are now in the discussion stage. Mary Jo Duffy comments that Blevins has "a real, real nice imagination, and also compassion. He shows compassion for his characters, good and bad. When he draws them, you can tell that he understands what they're feeling and communicates that."

The *Crystar* series did not originate with Duffy and Blevins, however. Duffy recalls that "There was a strong feeling editorially and, I think, in the sales department as well, that Marvel ought to be doing some kind of a fantasy book besides the sword and sorcery type material it's been doing. Mark Gruenwald, Ralph Macchio (as writers) and John Romita, Jr. (as illustrator) put their heads together and came up with the original *Crystar* concept. (Macchio is now *Crystar's* editor.) Jim Shooter was also extremely helpful to them, and Doug Polumbaum, who is from one of our licensing departments, also gave them much help. They came up with preliminary character designs and a very strong concept before Bret Blevins and I ever got involved in the project. Most of what they came up with remains in the series. They came up with the initial story, and it was only a question of rendering that initial story into a first issue, which is what we've done.

"What they gave Bret and me was something that was very detailed, but was not yet a living, breathing, flesh and blood story. Bret and I were faced with the problem of taking what were concepts, and turning them into people that we felt an audience could care about. What we did was less a matter of changing what we had been given than figuring out angles on its presentation, and motivations for what might have underlain the characters' actions that we felt would interest an audience, and that we could get behind as a continuing series. We needed to know who they were before they became Crystal and Molten Men. So what Bret and I did was figure out who these people were beneath the geological forms, and do about thirty pages of the first issue with them in their original flesh and blood shapes." So while John Romita, Jr. designed what the characters look like in their Crystal and Molten forms, Blevins designed their appearances as normal human beings.

CRYSTAR AND MOLTAR

"You can't start discussing the characters with Crystar alone," Mary Jo Duffy states, "because he is half of a pair of identical twins. He and his brother Moltar have just inherited the throne of the city of Galax on the planet Crystalium. Their father was killed during a war without making any provision for the future. What everyone assumes is that the twins are meant to inherit jointly and to rule jointly. They're both very young and very idealistic, and not as wise as they might be. That's the problem. They're maybe nineteen or twenty: old enough to hold the throne but not old enough to have any of the kind of wisdom that only age and experience bring."



Mary Jo Duffy

"Crystar is an *exceptionally* fine person," Duffy says. Bret Blevins puts the same idea in a different way, speaking of Crystar as "Mister Golden" and "Cary Grant." Duffy continues, "Crystar is perfectly happy to be Crystar, and to be Moltar's brother. Moltar is aware of the fact that he is inherently inferior to Crystar. Crystar is taller that he is; he's better at sports; he does better in his history exams; women love Crystar, but with Moltar, they take a little bit of convincing. Moltar loves Crystar very genuinely; they're very close. But Moltar has spent his entire life either comparing himself to his brother and competing with his brother, or being convinced — and sometimes being right — that everybody around them is comparing them and finding Moltar wanting."

Crystar is indeed heroic, but, Duffy points out, "He's very self-righteous. On the other hand, he's always right. He's not a vain man, but he's always right, and he knows he's always right."

Obviously, a situation that pairs these two in matters of serious consequence can lead to trouble. Duffy reports that "Some of the conflict comes out of their very sincere attempts at joint rule. Crystar — and he's right — is convinced that as a general rule when he and Moltar disagree, Moltar is wrong. When they disagree, each one feels that his opinion should hold sway. In theory, they're both happy to be joint rulers, but in effect, each one would like to have final say."

The uneasy relationship between the twins turns into open warfare as a result of external manipulation. The war in which their father died may appear to be over, but in reality, the menace continues. Forces of good and forces of evil, both from outside the planet, are competing for domination of Crystalium . On two separate nights, two wizards enter the palace of the Crystal Kingdom and each asks the twins to ally themselves with him in the coming conflict. One of the wizards, Ogeode, representative of the power of Order, tells them, "Throw in with me, and you'll be risking everything, and I doubt if I can do you much good." The other wizard, Zardeth, who purports to be serving the interests of Chaos, but is actually out for no one but himself, tells them, "Throw in with me, or I'll destroy all the people who depend on you and look to you." Moltar sides with Zardeth, believing that he must act to save the people of Crystalium . Crystar, on the other hand, chooses Ogeode, believing it would be wrong to side with the forces of evil, even if his people's safety is at risk. So it is that the two brothers find themselves on opposite sides of what will prove to be a terrible conflict.

Zardeth promises power to those who follow him, and so he transforms Moltar, Moltar's girlfriend Lavour, and Moltar's legions of minions into Molten Men, beings who retain their human form but are made of molten elements. This transformation is intentionally symbolic, Duffy points out, for the molten elements represent the forces of anarchy. "Moltar is ruled by his passions and the wilder emotions, and he's a turbulent sort. That's represented by the molten elements." The Molten Men are stronger and much less vulnerable to injury than ordinary humans. Bret Blevins says that he tries to portray them as "not quite solid. Their muscles slide as they move."

Since no mere human can stand up to the power of the Molten Men, Ogeode transforms Crystar and a number of his friends into the similarly powerful Crystal Men. They cannot generate heat like the Molten Men, but they can reflect light. These crystal forms are also symbolic. Whereas the Molten Men "slide" as they move, Blevins says that the Crystal Men move in a "straightforward" manner. They serve the power of Order, which, Duffy says, "is shown through the precision alignment of the crystal forms on the planet. Crystar most naturally" had to become a Crystal Man, "because he is a precise, clean-thinking individual like the precise, clean planes of crystal.

"So," Duffy says, "Crystar winds up becoming our hero and Moltar becomes our villain, but it's not really because Crystar is a good guy or Moltar is a bad guy. Moltar is sort of a tragic character because he is not overall down-to-his-toes Dr. Doom-type evil. He could be just about anybody; he could be you, he could be your friend. He's just gotten caught up in a situation that has played most upon his insecurities, his weaknesses, and whatever character flaws he has. Almost from the beginning, it's like a 'What If?' story. What if both brothers had gone with one wizard? Or what if Crystar had gone with Zardeth and Moltar had gone with Ogeode? I think part of the tension of this series is going to be the question of 'Is Moltar really a rotten guy, or is he just caught in circumstances beyond his control? If he had it all to do over again, would he do the right thing instead of the wrong thing?' Whatever kind of grandiose conflicts we may get into, I never want to lose sight of the fact that what we have here is a very human tragedy, which is that Crystar and Moltar genuinely love each other,

A Tail of Two Dragons—At left, the Magma Dragon as he will appear in Crystar. At right, the Magma Dragon as he will be in the toy stores. Preferences, anyone?

and that neither of them ever forgets that his most mortal enemy is the person he loves most in the world." Duffy sees this ironic situation as "the heart of the series" and the element that distinguishes it from other fantasy series in the comics medium.

Asked what distinguishes *Crystar* from other fantasy series in comics, Mary Jo Duffy replies, "What I think makes it different right now is a complete, utter, and total lack of elves and goblins."

Well, *Crystar* may have no elves, but it does have a dwarf, Feldspar by name; who is the twins' maternal uncle. "Whenever there is a conflict between the twins," recounts Duffy, "he takes both the twins' sides and mediates for them. That makes him an extremely valuable advisor in the kingdom and puts him in an extremely difficult position when the twins have their mystically motivated falling out." In keeping with his role of being "absolutely neutral" in the twins' disputes, Feldspar chooses to become half crystal and half molten. "He's crystal from the waist up and molten from the waste down."

While *Crystar* may lack elves it does have dragons. Plenty of dragons. Dragons everywhere you look. Many tamed dragons are used for transportation, either by land or (if the dragons fly) by air. Other dragons are wild and quite fierce. Some dragons breathe fire; others do not. "The way Bret and I have conceived this," says Duffy, "is there are no Earth animals on this planet. We've talked about doing dragons as a variation of everything, even little house dragons that have to use the litter box, and dragons that have to be walked on leash, and dragons that have to have the paper on the bottom of their little dragon cages changed every night. There'll be dragons that pull carts. Instead of birds, you have dragons. Instead of fish, you have dragons. 'Dragons' almost becomes a synonym for 'animals.' We're going to come up with all different varieties."

The first issue of *Crystar* will have a format similar to Epic Comics, printed on the high quality Baxter paper, with hand color separations. It will be forty- eight pages long, with forty-five of those pages devoted to the story. Thereafter, *Crystar* will be a regular bimonthly comic book printed on newsprint.

Morever, the Remco Toy Company is developing a line of toys for next year based on the *Crystar* characters, and will use the first issue of *Crystar* as a promotional tool for them. Marvel has begun

work on coloring and activity books for younger children based on the *Crystar* series. It should be noted that *Crystar* is a series that originated at and is owned by Marvel. Marvel does not license the series from a toy company as it does with *Micronauts* and *Rom*; the toy company licenses it from Marvel.

In fact, it is appropriate that *Crystar* should have appeal to younger people as well as the regular Marvel readership. It is not a typical sword and sorcery series. "No barbarians here" says Mary Jo Duffy; "We've got princes and accountants." Summing *Crystar* up, she says, "I would almost call this a classic fairy tale, going back to the Brothers Grimm. This is a real traditional tale, but it's being interpreted in modern graphic terms."

On the preceding pages are shown you character models by John Romita, Jr. of Crystar, Mortar, the Magma Dragons and Feldspar. Above are samples of the completed pages for CRYSTAR #1, pencils by Bret Blevins and inks by Vince Colletta.

EDITORIAL NOTES

JIM SHOOTER

When I was a bit younger, one day it occured to me that Marvel Comics could be even better than they were, if only the people who made them would hire a bright, knowledgeable fan—like me—to read over the stuff they were doing before it went out, catch some of the little gaffs, check the continuity, give creative advice from the fan point of view, and in general, guard the integrity of the Marvel Universe.

Well, they *did* hire such a person—me, in fact—back in 1978. Since then, I've learned how hard it is to do all of the above—even when you're vested with the absolute, staggering authority and wonderfully nifty title of Editor-in-Chief.

It still amazes me sometimes, being Editor-in-Chief—being pretty much *in charge* of all the comics and magazines Marvel publishes and all of the editors and other people who work on them.

But, I haven't forgotten what the title really should be—something like *Executive Fan Representative*, or maybe *Designated Fan*. And, I haven't lost sight of what I'd hoped to accomplish way back when, before I got this job.

Like I said, as it turns out, it isn't easy.

But, I'm still trying. And I'm getting better at it, I think. I hope you'll agree, after reading about what each of our Marvel Editors has coming up, and I hope you'll agree even more after you've seen it all unfold in the comics issue by issue.

If you don't. . . or even if you do, let me know. You know my address, and you know I read every single letter. Hey, if I'm going to be the DF here, I've got to keep in touch, right?

TOM DeFALCO

TWISTED TOM'S TWO-FISTED TIPS & TALES: Heh! Heh! Heh! They're trying to trick me. . . but it's won't work. I'm not going to talk. I absolutely refuse to divulge anything of value. Carol Kalish and Peter David think they can use this column to pry top-secret information from me—the inside scoops on all the comics I'm editing. *Ha!* They haven't got a chance! I learned my lesson from Elsie Carson, the Southwestern Regional Director of Hydra Central (see TEAM AMERICA #11). . . "in an organization like Hydra *(or Marvel)*, knowledge is power!" I'm going to hoard all of my information, and keep all of my upcoming developments to myself!

There's no way I'm going to tell them about the major change that will occur in AMAZING SPIDER-MAN #241, and permanently affect Peter Parker's life! I absolutely refuse to discuss the Black Cat, and how she will prominently figure into Spider-Man's life for the foreseeable future.

Everyone has heard that issue #81 will be the last of GHOST RIDER, but I'm the only one who knows how we'll completely wrap up all of his dangling continuity—completely tie up all of his loose ends—and bring the series to a *permanent*, heart-stopping conclusion! *Heh! Heh! Heh!* There will never *ever* be an eighty-second issue of GHOST RIDER. Like the old TV series *The Fugitive*, we'll end it totally and finally resolve the war between Johnny Blaze, Zarathos, and the demon's century-old foe. . . but, unlike on television, comic books don't always have *happy* endings. *Heh! Heh! Heh!*

I'm not even going to talk about the comic books I'll be writing. No one must learn of the drastic new changes I have in mind for MACHINE MAN. I can't let anyone hear about the wild ideas I have in store for RED SONJA.

Why *should* I share my information? I keep a full candy jar on my desk at all times. For a nominal charge and an occasional pound of flesh (Jim Shooter has taught me well), I'm quite willing to share my goodies with everyone at MARVEL. Isn't that enough?!

Give to me the break!

Besides, since when did anyone share with me? I've worked at MARVEL for almost two years now, and never—not once, mind you—has anyone taken the time to explain the MARVEL *"House Look"* to me.

Don't smirk! You know what I'm talking about. I've read about it in the fan press, and heard it spoken of at conventions. The *"House Look"*.

All right, I give up. Will someone—anyone—please point out the similarities between artists such as John Buscema, Herb Trimpe, Paul Smith, John Romita Jr., Frank Miller and Al Milgrom?

C'mon, explain the "House Look" to me. I'm an editor. I'm supposed to know these things. And don't try to cop out with answers like "clear storytelling" and "dramatic pictures". Every artist needs those qualities or they end up in Desperation City.

Enough of this silly column! I have important work to do. Like finding a new source of sour balls for my candy jar, and continuing my ever-eternal search for a decent dietetic pizza!

NEXT MONTH: Maybe I'll share. . . and maybe I won't. Also, a number of you have noticed that the continuity is growing tighter between the three different Spider-Man titles. In my next column, I'll give you a behind-the-scenes look on how that's being accomplished. (Hey, it's easy coordinating three writers, six artists and one character. Yeah, sure.)

DENNY O'NEIL & Linda Grant

I guess it's logical that I can't tell you much about GI JOE. I mean the Joes *are* a military unit and those Pentagon types enjoy stamping things TOP SECRET almost more than they enjoy figuring out end-of-the-world scenarios.

Of course, some of it you probably already know. Like that GI JOE is, first, a line of action toys, made by Hasbro, which, I'm told, rival the *STAR WARS* figures in popularity among the nation's kids. (And among adults? A small *personal* secret: I have eight of the figures sitting on the bureau across from my bed. Somehow, in the middle of the night, it's comforting to look up and see Scarlet, Snake Eyes, Rock 'N' Roll and the rest watching over me. With some people, it's stuffed elephants or rabbits' feet; with me, it's GI JOE.) What GI JOE is, second, is a Marvel Comic that the fans don't seem to realize exists. Another example of secrecy.

That will soon change. Last year, Marvel and Hasbro collaborated on a television commercial that advertised the comic, not the toys, and helped alert comics buyers to the title's existence. Consider that the beginning. Within a few months you can expect to see Whoops! Almost blew it. As noted above, there's not a lot I'm allowed to say.

I *will* state, almost unequivocally, that GI JOE is a pretty nifty comic and that people will begin paying attention to it in the near future. Hordes of people. Demanding it. With money in their hands.

The Joes won't be a secret much longer.

RALPH MACCHIO & Bob Harras

How about some advice to those considering a career as a comicbook scripter, or a writing career in general? It seems as if this topic is discussed ad nauseam by professionals at Comics Conventions. Still, we at Marvel continue to receive plot and script submissions in which the rudiments of writing are largely ignored. And if we're to believe the information coming to us from colleges, well over half the incoming freshmen cannot pass tests of basic English skills. Obviously, the lessons are not being learned.

To begin with, commercial writing is a form of communication with an audience. Think about that word "communication." It means imparting information, making someone aware of something. (Here, I'm speaking strictly of word usage; story structure is a topic for another time.) You must say what you wish to say, clearly and concisely—and then shut up. The biggest problem writers face is not starting, but stopping. One would think this would be unnecessary to even mention. It's not. I've plowed through a plenitude of plot and script submissions in which the "writer" has used the most convoluted syntax and ponderous prose to convey a simple thought. Why?

Evidently, the nascent writer feels he'd best impress everyone with his vast vocabulary and stunning facility with language. What he succeeds in doing is sending his audience off to dreamland. The worst sin you can commit is to bore your readers. Don't go on and on with metaphorical excesses, or strain for assonance or alliteration. Avoid piling up two or three adjectives or adverbs behind a respective noun or verb, where one will suffice. Don't use the fifty-buck word unless it fits smoothly in the sentence. Go back to the basics of learning to construct a sentence and communicate your thought on paper—precisely. The reader will respond to your prose if he's given the chance to interact with it. If you keep him at arm's length with unnatural or awkward language usage, you've failed at the task of achieving that crucial interaction you must strive for in your work.

Less is more. Simple is best. I can't stress the value of this enough, particularly for the comics scripter who must learn to keep his writing strong and basic to be most effective. And should you ever doubt the power of simple prose, try coming up with a phrase that carries more impact than these three words, "I love you."

EDITORIAL NOTES

LOUISE JONES & Denny Fingeroth

We've got so much cooking, we're thinking about getting a second stove. Item. The X-MEN GRAPHIC NOVEL: *"God Loves, Man Kills,"* which should be on sale by the time you read this, is just about ready to leave our offices for the printer. We thought what Chris and Brent had done couldn't be any better. Then we saw Steve Oliff's coloring. Yow. Item. You got a glimpse of Armando Gil's pencils in KA-ZAR #s23 and 24. Well, the kid was just warming up, because in issue #27, he pencils (and inks) the entire story (a 32-pager, incidentally) as he will be doing from here on in. And believe us, he's the hottest new penciler since Ron Frenz. And speaking of Ron, bet you're wondering what he's gonna be doing. Well, that brings us to our next... Item: Ron's gonna be moving over to STAR WARS (as well as to MARVEL TEAM-UP, but let DeFalco talk about that in *his* column), teaming up with Tom Palmer to dazzle your optic sensors. Item. KA-ZAR #29 will be 48 pages with no ads, on sale direct *and* newsstand. It features landmark developments in the lives of Ka-Zar and Shanna and the return of—well, never mind... Item: THE NEW MUTANTS will be joined by... Professor Xavier's son?!... Item: Beginning with issue #6, David Michelinie and Kerry Gammill will be taking over the creative chores on INDIANA JONES (which is why Ron was able to move over to TEAM-UP; Kerry's former post). We're as anxious as you to see his first work but, to tell the truth, we're not worried... Item: Just because X-MEN is the best-selling comic in the galaxy, we're not going to be resting on our laurels. Nope, Chris, Paul and Bob have been busily plotting the fantastic series of stories leading up to our decades-in-the-making 20th anniversary, 175th issue and we're truly excited about what's gonna be going on. What *is* gonna be going on? Let's just say for now, that a lot of things you thought could never change... just might not be as immutable as you thought. Intrigued? We thought so.

So that's the story. Or part of it, anyway. See ya.

Louise & Denny

MARK GRUENWALD & Mike Carlin

My line of books is the A-Team, as I call them, the Avengers family of titles. Ever since I bought AVENGERS #1 off the stands when I was a runny-kneed lad of eleven, the Avengers has been the quintessential Marvel comic to me (even though I didn't know any words that began with a "Q" as a kid). Because of the Avengers' unique "melting pot" flavor, it always seemed like the axis or crossroads of the Marvel Universe, the book with the greatest potential for pivotal events and far-reaching developments. For most of its history, this has been true. And now that this runny-kneed lad of twenty-nine is in charge, look out! As if ace scripter Roger Stern weren't excited and exciting enough (and he is—being a former AVENGERS editor himself and one of the soldest writers in the field today), I stay awake nights sometimes thinking of new things to move and shake the world of our awesome Assemblers. (If you don't believe me, ask my wife . please)

Being a mainline Marvel maniac from the dawn of the age, I have a pretty good idea of the highs and lows of each of the titles' multi-year runs. My goal is to surpass (or match if the highwater mark was set by guys like Lee and Kirby) the quality and excitement from each of the four Avengers books' top creative periods. You bet there's a pretty high goal to have—but hey, one's reach should always exceed one's grasp or you ain't reaching high enough, right?

So, all of what I just said is fine and good, but I've been pretty general. How do I specifically intend to turn the four Avengers books into pucks (in-joke for Alpha Flight fans come April) to kick toward my goals? Well, rufus, that's what this editor's editor wants me to write about in this space, but -uip- I'm all out of room. Next, month, I'll get down to the specifics. Till then, go out and avenge something.

LARRY HAMA & Jim Owsley

Here it is, Monday morning and I'm pounding away at a typewriter while a jet-lag headache is pounding away at my cerebral cortex, trying to get this column done by 1:30 when the messenger comes by to haul the manuscripts away to the typesetters. And it's not just jet-lag either. Do you have any idea what happens to your optic nerves after you've spent three days sitting in a dark windowless room looking at little flickering pictures on a motion picture editing deck? So much for beating around the bush and filling up space—What I've been really trying to say is that Denny O'Neil and I have just returned from sunny California (it rained for the first two days) where we have been working on the first stages of transmuting Ralph Bakshi's animated feature "Fire and Ice" into comic book form. The film is gorgeous. It was designed by Frank Frazetta. Nuff said? Frazetta did more than design sketches though... He put a lot of *himself* into it. He had a lot of story input and even directed the movements and poses of the live action actors employed for the rotograph film footage. Awesome. This is the closest you will ever come to seeing a Frazetta painting come to life. Ralph Bakshi deserves a lot of credit for even attempting this project.

Anyway true believers, the cels and the backgrounds for "Fire and Ice" looked so vibrant and intense that we couldn't think of any way to do an adaptation that would do the film justice other than blowing up the *actual frames* of the movie and using *them* as the art-work. In other words, what you see in the comic book will be what you see in the film!

ARCHIE GOODWIN & Jo Duffy

Sometime when I wasn't looking, I became one of the grand old men of comics. Well... one of the old men of the comics at least. (This is Archie Goodwin talking by the way, my associate editor, Jo Duffy, may well be grand, but old or a man, she ain't.) It's been about twenty years since I started in the field. During that time, I've probably hopped, skipped, and jumped around from company to company and job to job more than any three of my contemporaries. Let's face it: I'm restless and easily tempted. And yet... I'm about to begin my fourth year on EPIC ILLUSTRATED. That's longer than I've worked anywhere in comics. Ever. Have I changed? Maybe. Mostly though, I think I've lighted on maybe the ideal project for a gadabout like me. In the coming year, EPIC will feature work by Berni Wrightson, Chris Claremont, Mike Kaluta, Roy Thomas, Barry Windsor-Smith, Larry Niven, Jim Steranko, Vaughn Bode, Don McGregor, P. Craig Russell, John Bolton, and whole bunch of other large name type talents. It will also feature stories by Will brown, Jean Bello, Scott Hampton, John Zack, Jay Muth, Wade Hampton, and may others who, if not quite new, are not yet household names, but carry the skill and potential to become that. EPIC will carry projects as varied as *Generation Zero*, a long running post-holocaust adventure series by Pepe Moreno and yours truly, *Devil's Advocate*, complete in one issue romantic fantasy by Barry Windsor-Smith, *Dr. Watchstop*, short doses of everyone's favorite comic funny animal and tongue-in-cheek sword and sorcery from Jo Duffy and Kent Williams, *Tailgunner*. Each issue is a little like Christmas for me. Something a little different in every package. Who'd want to move along when *anything* is possible in the next issue? Well, so far, not me. Not me by a long shot. And, hey that's without even counting the stuff for EPIC COMICS or the occasional graphic novel that we do. Could it be that Jim Shooter and Mike Hobson and other simular types at Marvel have hooked me for life? Check out this space next time and let's see.

AL MILGROM & Ann Nocenti

The question I am most frequently asked by the disappointed fans who occasionally traipse through the Marvel offices (disappointed because I have just informed them that no, John Byrne doesn't work here, no, neither does Chris Claremont, and no, very few of the writers or artists or inkers or letterers or colorists do work in the Marvel offices) is: "What does an editor do?" It's a little hard to explain because in many ways it seems as if an editor's sole purpose is to move material from one creative person to the next, a sort of Man Friday to the Postal Service. Partly, this is true. The editor is the traffic manager for the books he edits, responsible for the work getting done on time (or if not actually *on* time, then at least soon enough for the comic to get to the printer when it absolutely, *positively* has to be there overnight). He also serves a more creative, but less clearly defined, purpose as the creative director of the entire process by which a comic is crafted.

To begin with, the editor and writer of the comic have a plot conference. This can be anything from a brief two sentence summary of the plot, to a multi-hour, three meal, call-you-back-tomorrow type wrestling match. In this session we try to hammer out the basic premise of the plot, get rid of the wrong stuff, keep the right stuff and try to bring something different and unique to each issue. From this point on the editor assumes a role somewhat akin to Jim Starlin's In-Betweener character. In between the writer, and the penciler the editor reads the story plot, makes any final changes and/or corrections, gets the necessary reference together for the penciler to draw and sends it to penciler. In between the penciler and writer, the editor checks the drawing to make sure that the story-telling is clear, that the art is dramatic and dynamic, and that

there are no major flaws in the basic draftsmanship. After any necessary art corrections are made, it is then returned to the writer for scripting. In between the writer and letterer, the editor reads the script, edits it (where necessary) to make sure the writer accomplishes what he intended and to ensure that the story is clear, dramatic, dynamic and that there are no unexplained elements left from the basic plot. Then the writer's balloon placement is checked to be sure the captions and dialogue all read in the proper sequence and off to the letterer goes the art and script. Usually, once a job is lettered, it goes straight to the inker, without any in between stage. The inker works his magic on the penciler's drawings and the artwork comes back to the editor. The comic is proofread, any spelling errors, misplaced balloons, script omissions, incorrect costumes or other mistakes in the art are then caught (hopefully) and corrected. Meanwhile, the colorist applies dyes to small photostats of the art which the editor checks to be sure that the storytelling is clear, the artwork made to look dramatic and dynamic and that there are no characters colored incorrectly. In between the coloring, and the printing plant, the editor puts together the letters page and/or writes his editorial (in my case Editori-Al) and has a nervous breakdown.

What does an editor do? It's a little hard to explain.

JOHN BUSCEMA was asked what would strike Conan as funny. The long-time Cimmerian penciller pondered and replied, "If Conan were walking along with a pikeman, and the pikeman tripped and showered himself on his pike, Conan would burst into laughter." PAUL SMITH, X-Men penciller and certainly no pike himself, rendered this interpretation of said hilarious event.

THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE

by Peter Sanderson

What is the Marvel Universe, you may ask? Simply put, it is the collection of characters; buildings, cities, and countries on Earth, past and future time eras; planets, solar systems, and galaxies; and alien and mystical dimensions that are depicted in Marvel comics. From Marvel's beginning, two decades ago, characters from one series would make appearances in another, and therefore, virtually all of Marvel's series interrelate. Together they constitute the Marvel Universe, which has become the most extensive literary mythos of the twentieth century.

It is only appropriate, then, that Marvel should produce a guidebook to all of its many characters and worlds, and so now there is the twelve issue *Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe,* a kind of illustrated encyclopedia in comics format, whose first issue went on sale in October. Both new Marvel readers who want to learn about the characters for the first time, and longtime fans in search of new details about their favorites should find a great deal to interest them in the *Handbook*.

Marvel's editor-in-chief Jim Shooter came up with the idea for the *Handbook*. In looking for unusual projects for Marvel to publish, he remembered the tremendous mail response to the three-page section of the *1981 Amazing Spider-Man Annual* that ranked Marvel's superheroes according to strength. Those three pages got twice as much mail as an issue of *The X-Men!* Shooter realized that there was a great deal of interest among readers in the specifics of the characters' powers, and so, in a conversation with Marvel writer Roger Stern, he evolved the idea for what he called the "Super-Specs" book, which would simply give the exact specifications of everyone's powers and explain how they worked.

The "Super-Specs" book was assigned to editor Mark Gruenwald and assistant editor Mike Carlin. Gruenwald has had a great deal of experience in trying to make comics characters and their powers and backgrounds seem as believable as possible through his magazine *Omniverse*, which he began in his fan days. Under Gruenwald, the project expanded into something more like an encyclopedia of the Marvel Universe, complete with an alphabetical format, and it took on its final name, *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe.*

SELECTING THE ENTRIES

Thirty of the pages in each issue of the *Handbook* each feature, for the most part, only one or two characters. These are the characters who get the full *Handbook* treatment: biographical data such as the names of known relatives, physical description including height and weight, a recounting of the character's origin, and an explanation of the working and limitations of the character's abilities.

Obviously, there is not room, even in a twelve-issue series, for such detailed treatment of all the hundreds of characters devised over the twenty-one years of Marvel's history. Most have to be relegated to brief mentions in the appendices on the inside back covers of the *Handbooks*, and even then, various minor characters must be left out for lack of space. It has been decided not to deal at all with non-super-powered cast members, such as J. Jonah Jameson. After all, they have no powers that require explanation.

So who does get the feature treatment? On Jim Shooter's request, all currently active Marvel Universe superheroes receive feature pages. "Active" is the key word here. As Mark Gruenwald puts it, "The first major criterion" in selecting feature page candidates "is 'Are they alive or are they dead?'" Captain Marvel I, Phoenix, and Warlock, all deceased, will receive extended entries in the appendices, but will not get their own pages. Nor will retired superheroes like Yellowjacket. Moreover, characters who are not active in the present will not get feature pages, whether they are from the past, like Devil Dinosaur and the Invaders, or from an alternate future, like Killraven. Exceptions to this rule are the Guardians of the Galaxy, who often visit the present, and Deathlok, who will turn up again in 1983.

"The next consideration," continues Gruenwald, "is that generally heroes get more space than villains. A minor hero would get more space than a minor villain." Gruenwald has tried to include all the major recurring villains. Beyond that, he chose villains "who can do interesting or unusual things, and maybe only appeared twice or three times, but are certainly unique to merit explaining. Once people see how good they are,

The covers of volumes 2 and 3 of the Marvel Handbook. When completed, the covers will form a giant mural, three covers wide by four down. Note here, for example, how Cloak and Dagger are begun on one cover and completed on the next. Some carryovers will be even more extreme: Galactus will have his top half appear on one cover and his bottom half some three months later on another

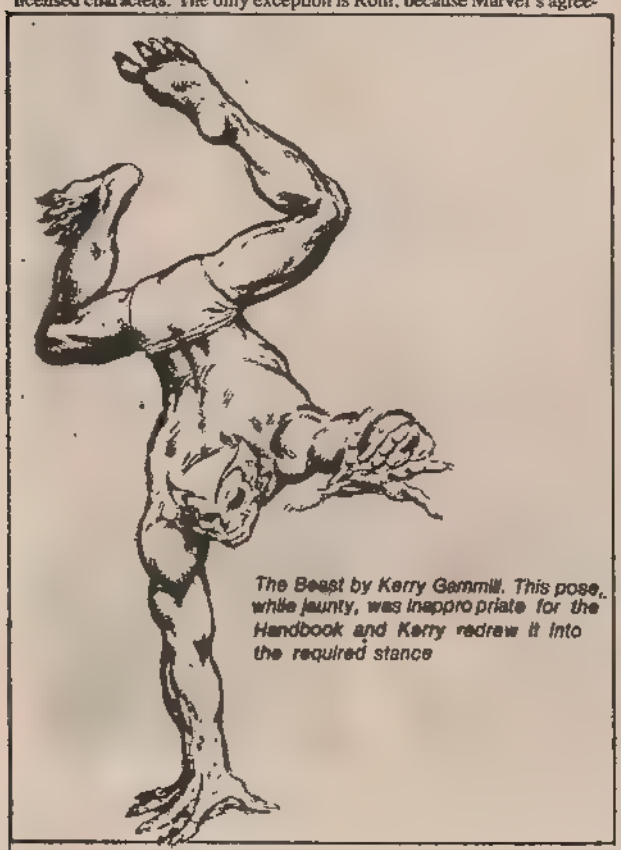
they'll probably want to use them" in their stories instead of some of the more overexposed villains. An example in the *Handbook* is the Basilisk, whom Gruenwald thought had "a nice name, a good visual, and even though he only appeared in two two-part stories, I thought he could be a worthwhile villain. So I decided to write him up, do him right, and make his powers make sense."

(L-R) Eliot Brown, typesetter and technical expert, Mark Gruenwald, editor; Mike Carlin, assistant editor, and Joe Rubenstein, inker, trying to place the blame.

To make certain that no one important was left out, Gruenwald compiled a list of characters to be featured, divided it up according to which books they were in, and give it to each of the Marvel editors. They then added characters to the list whom they believed were important, and deleted others who they felt did not deserve such attention.

Another important criterion in selection is that the characters mentioned in this *Handbook* have to have been established as existing within the mainstream Marvel Universe. Star-Lord, for example, will not appear because there is no evidence that he has anything to do with the world of the other Marvel characters.

Perhaps most importantly, any character who appears in the *Handbook* must be owned by Marvel. No Robert E. Howard or George Lucas creation will turn up in the *Handbook*, nor will the Micronauts or any other licensed characters. The only exception is Rom, because Marvel's agreement with Parker Brothers gives it more rights to Rom than it has to other licensed properties. However, in some cases Marvel owns the supporting characters it created for a book about a licensed character, and they will be mentioned. For example, the monster-creating Doctor Demonicus was created as a villain for Marvel's *Godzilla* book in the 1970s, and he will turn up in an appendix, although Godzilla will not receive any entry at all.



The Beast by Kerry Gammill. This pose, while jaunty, was inappropriate for the Handbook and Kerry redrew it into the required stance.

The last two pages of each issue of the *Handbook* spotlight various races of extraterrestrials in the Marvel Universe, often providing new information about them such as the names of their planets and the nature of their forms of government. These pages emphasize alien races that are not exact duplicates of Earth people (as Rom's Galadorians or the Silver Surfer's Zenn-Lavians are), even if these truly alien races only appeared briefly. Again, the reasoning is that the less humanoid an alien race is, the more explanation it requires.

Gruenwald sums up: "In general, all of the major Stan Lee character are right in there, other characters intimately associated with active books are in there, and if there's any room for anything else, it's a judgement call by myself."

The She-Hulk as depicted by Bret Blevins—appealing but unusable since she no longer wears torn shirts (although if she'd always looked like this, her book might never have been cancelled).

WRITING THE ENTRIES

The process of writing the feature pages begins with the work of what Gruenwald calls his "crack team of researchers," who go through Marvel's library of bound volumes of past issues, locating any biographical data on the characters that has been revealed, and "writing down page, issue, and panel citations on uses of powers." They may also consult Marvel writers closely associated with particular characters. For example, especially inasmuch as there is as yet so little material on them, the researchers consult Chris Claremont for information about the New Mutants.

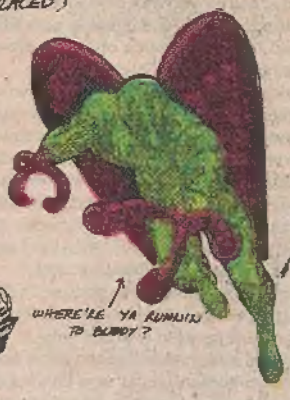
"All of this raw data," Gruenwald continues, "is then fed to me, the head writer of the book." Gruenwald looks at the various uses a character makes of his power, and tries to make them consistent. If a particular use of a power in one instance does not make sense, then it may have to be dismissed as erroneous. For example, Gruenwald says, "There's just no way that the Angel could have made a transatlantic flight under his own power," as he was once said to do, "unless we redefine the whole parameters of how he flies. He could not fly that distance unaided unless he's got a metabolism unlike anything we've ever seen, and that's a whole new super-power that has never been evidenced in any other way."

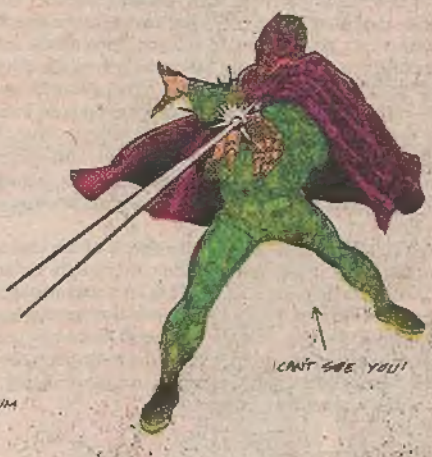
GUIDE SHEET FOR MARVEL UNIVERSE

THE PURPOSE OF THE MAIN CHARACTER ILLUSTRATION OF EACH ENTRY IN **THE OFFICIAL HANDBOOK OF THE MARVEL UNIVERSE** IS TO DEPICT COSTUMES, NOT POWERS! THEY ARE MODEL SHEETS OF HOW TO DRAW THE CHARACTERS. POWERS WILL BE DEMONSTRATED IN SMALL PANELS, CULLED FROM STATS, PRINTED ALONGSIDE THE ESTABLISHING SHOT. WE ARE TRYING TO AVOID STRANGE POSES AND WEIRD ANGLES NO MATTER HOW DRAMATIC!! THEY SHOULD BE STANDING SQUARELY ON THE GROUND, FACING FRONT, NOT LETTING HANDS OR CAPES OBSCURE COSTUME DETAILS. THEY SHOULD NOT BE WALKING, RUNNING, GOOSE STEPPING, LEG-TUCKING, NOSE PICKING OR ANYTHING!!! **JUST STANDING!** NO DOWN SHOTS! NO SIDE SHOTS! NO HAND STANDS! NO ARMS-A-FLAILING! NO LEGS AKIMBO! NO NO MANETTE! **JUST STANDING!!** OH, YEAH, NO BACKGROUNDS, EITHER. (CHARACTERISTIC WEAPONRY IS PERMISSABLE IF STRATEGICALLY PLACED.)

DON'T FORGET: WE GOTTA WRITE WORDS NEXTA DESE GUYS... SO KEEP YOUR CAPES AND WEAPONRY CLOSE TO HOME!

THE SIX FIGURES BELOW, WHILE FINELY EXECUTED ARE UNACCEPTABLE!!!





NOW THESE ARE GOOD MARVEL UNIVERSE POSES!!

Moreover, Gruenwald wants to make the characters' powers as logical and credible as possible. "We are proceeding from the premise that physics in the Marvel Universe is the same as it is here. A few things may be unknown to our physics, but the basic principles are the same. We're just trying to make the made-up stuff as finite as possible, and base everything else on as much physical science and reality as we can make the structure master." It is more difficult to make sense of some characters' powers than of others; take Black Bolt, for example. "It's said that he manipulates electrons, but sometimes he manipulates electrons to do things they just don't do in nature. They don't become solid and you can't walk on them. And besides, what does manipulation of electrons have to do with the sonic power of his voice?"

So Gruenwald writes a rough draft of an entry once he figures out "some logical way" in which the character's powers can work. He then consults the *Handbook's* typesetter and technical expert, Eliot R. Brown, who uses his scientific background to "make sure that the explanations we come up with would not be laughed at and torn up by a physicist. If we've got to invent a new unknown subatomic particle that interacts with Black Bolt's electrons to make them solid, okay, but that's only a single unknown variable within a complex structure that really exists."

Then Gruenwald types up the entry, and "If there is a writer who is intimately involved with the character, I generally let him read it or read it to him and ask, 'Now does this sound straight?'" After that, Gruenwald gives the entry to Jim Shooter, who will either approve it or send it back to be reworked. "Sometimes," says Gruenwald, "we come up with explanations that are a bit too complicated even for us. Jim is wonderful in that he's able to figure this out at a glance, and say, 'It's got to be simpler than this. There's got to be an easier way to explain this.' And then Eliot and I go to work and we simplify it and still make the explanation work."

Once Shooter approves an entry on the extent and workings of a character's powers, Gruenwald says, "as far as he is concerned, this is the way it is," and future stories will have to abide by what is in that entry.

"We're also providing background information that somehow in the twenty years plus of Marvel Comics has been missing," says Gruenwald. "Baron Mordo has never had a full name. Now he does, compliments of current *Dr. Strange* writer Roger Stern: Karl Amadeus Mordo." The second issue provides the never before published answer to the question of what Captain America's shield is made of. But, Gruenwald assures, "we're not going to give away things that have story potential to them." In the Cloak and Dagger entry, for example, "we're not going to say what exactly this extradimensional dark force Cloak draws upon is, because I happen to know that's what their forthcoming mini-series is about. We're just trying to fill in all the basics, like places of birth. This kind of information is being invented, generally, by the writer of the specific character, or otherwise by myself if he's not under the direct auspices of a given writer."

Moreover, "This is just the working handbook of the characters' powers as we now know them, and shouldn't necessarily tie anyone down." If the *Handbook* states that Thor is able to lift *x* amount of pounds, that does not mean that in a future story Thor cannot discover that he could possibly lift *x* plus one. A character might be able to find a new use for a power that the *Handbook* did not cover. "One of the great things about the Marvel Universe," says Gruenwald, "is that it is an ever-changing, ever-growing thing. And the characters grow too."

SELECTING THE ARTISTS

Josef Rubinstein, who inks all the new illustrations for the *Handbook*, points out that "It's a must for art lovers considering the incredible assemblage of talent." Indeed, the first two issues alone contain new work by John Byrne, Dave Cockrum, Edward Hannigan, Bob Layton, Steve Leialoha, Allen Milgrom, Frank Miller, John Romita, Jr., Walt Simonson, and Paul Smith. Moreover, the depictions these artists do of the featured characters in the *Handbook* are intended to be the definitive portraits of the characters, to be followed in the future by all Marvel artists. Gruenwald points out that in many cases involving characters who do not appear every month, costumes can vary from one story to another. Look, for example, at the differences in the suits of armor worn by the various Crimson Dynamos over the years. "In that case," says Gruenwald, "the artist and myself decide the definitive way of doing this character's costume."

The new illustrations in the *Handbook*, therefore, are designed to give readers — whether they are fans or comics professionals — a good, clear look at the character and his or her costume. Many pages also contain small inset illustrations depicting the character in action, all reprinted from past Marvel stories, many of them now considered classics.

Considering the significance of the new illustrations, the process of choosing artists for them is very important indeed. Gruenwald's first criterion is to try to get the artist who designed the character, if he still works for the company and is willing. Hence, John Byrne draws the members of Alpha Flight, and Ed Hannigan does Cloak and Dagger. Gruenwald also located Dave Cockrum's original unpublished drawings of the new X-Men, and will be using them. Second, if Gruenwald cannot get the character's designer, then he tries to assign the artist currently working on the character's book. Therefore, John Byrne gets first crack at doing the definitive portraits of all *Fantastic Four*-related characters, and Paul Smith is first choice for drawing most of the *X-Men* cast. "The third criterion," Gruenwald states, "is getting a great artist who fits a character" even if the artist has no "special claim" to him. For example, he says, "Frank Miller and the Punisher fit." Gruenwald notes that "Joe Rubinstein has been instrumental in drumming up interest in this book, so a lot of people who perhaps aren't even working actively on series for the company now are interested in doing the definitive version of Dragon Man or whoever for inclusion."

Rubinstein's importance to the project is considerable, as Gruenwald explains. "We have a lot of diverse styles of pencils in this series. It would be hard for you to believe that a Bill Sienkiewicz character could exist in the same space with a Herb Trimpe character and interact with him." Joe Rubinstein, who inks all of these artists' drawings for the *Handbook*, "brings an artistic common ground to the depiction of all the various artists' designs. His mastery of the pen and brush makes all of the people look as if they're from the same universe."

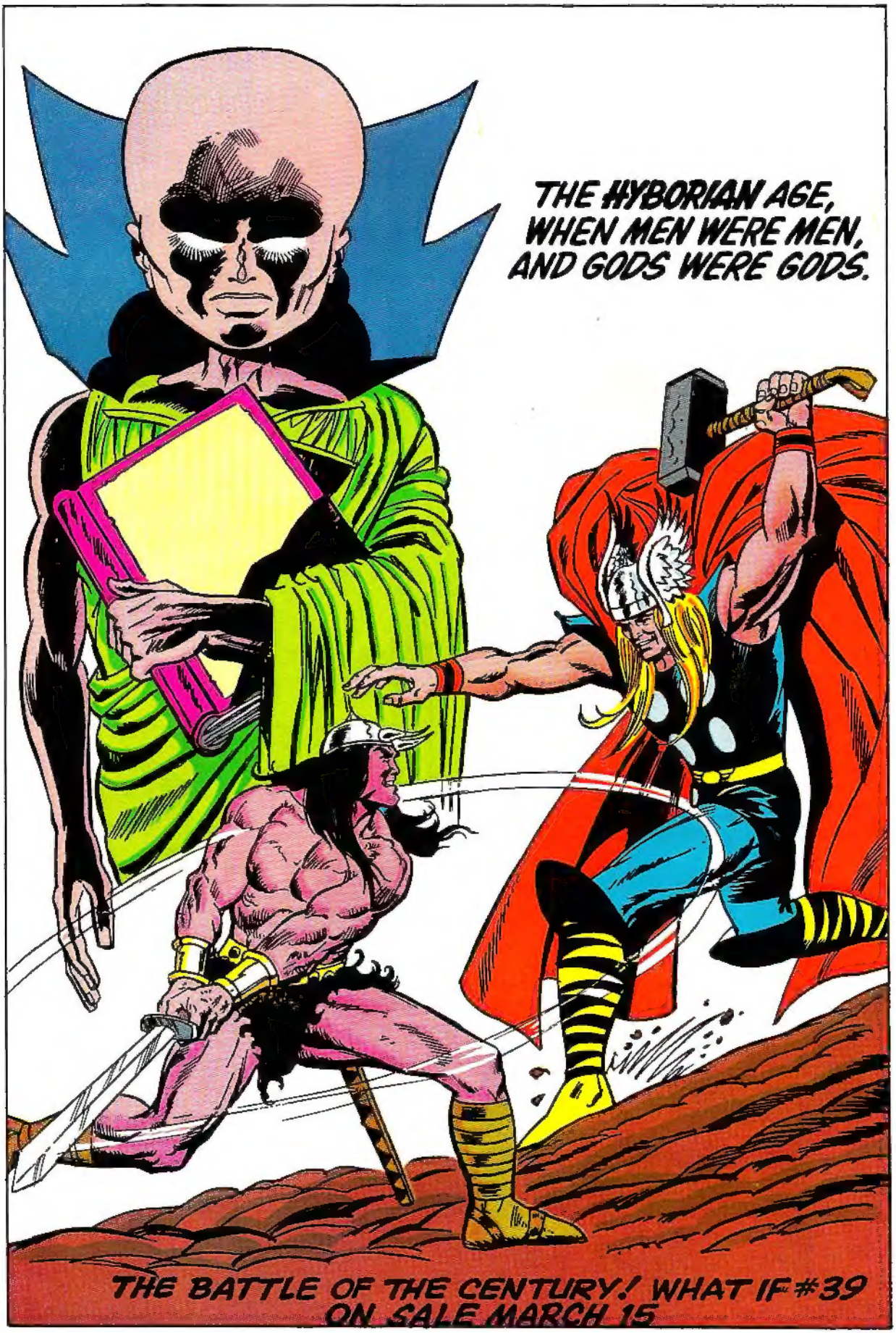
THE *HANDBOOK'S* FUTURE

The word "Official" in the title of *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe" is significant, because the Handbook* is not being put together just for the readers. As noted, it is to be used as a reference work — a "bible" on the characters — by Marvel's writers and artists. Mark Gruenwald states that "We're going to send a set to every artist we've got working for us, and keep a stack of literally thousands around the office for future use." Other sets will be used by Marvel Productions' animation studio and still others by Marvel's merchandising department to acquaint people with the characters.

Furthermore, work on the *Handbook* will not come to an end when issue 12 is completed. It is planned to revise and reissue the entire *Handbook* from time to time in future years, in order to bring it up to date with developments in the ever-changing, ever-expanding Marvel Universe.

In short, then, as Mark Gruenwald puts it, *The Official Handbook of the Marvel Universe* "is absolutely indispensable to anyone who likes *any* of the series, because with Marvel you *can't* just like one series: they all interrelate." The *Handbook* will act as a simple but comprehensive guide to anyone who wants to explore the many and fascinating worlds that comprise the Marvel Universe.

The example Mike Carlin gave as to what sort of character poses would be required for the Handbook and what a completed page would actually look like.


THE HYBORIAN AGE, WHEN MEN WERE MEN, AND GODS WERE GODS.
THE BATTLE OF THE CENTURY! WHAT IF #39 ON SALE MARCH 15

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